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Yarnin up action research to make a difference in the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples - Janet Kelly and Kim O'Donnell

Reflections from the ALARPM National Conference Organisers

This article reflects our collaborative planning of the 2007 Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management conference, where the principles of action learning, collaborative practice and process management guided our activity.

Janet Kelly, Helen Murray and Kim O'Donnell 'clicked' when they met at Flinders University, South Australia in 2005. Even though they came from very different backgrounds, they found many similar interests and concerns. Janet originally comes from Kangaroo Island, is a mother, a community health nurse, and a PhD candidate searching for ways to make health services more Nunga friendly, particularly for Aboriginal women.

Helen Murray is a mother, grandmother, and the 'Elder' of the three, with a passion for learning about Aboriginal ways of knowing and doing. She weaves in and out of 'blackfulla' and 'whitefulla' ways with ease, always searching for respectful ways to bring people together toward improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people.

Kim O'Donnell is a mother and Wiimpatja woman from the Barkindji nation in far Western NSW. She grew up in Wilcannia, Sydney and Dubbo and is Chair of the Mutawintji National Park Board of Management. Mutawintji is her mother's country, located 130 km north east of Broken Hill and is the first national park in NSW to be handed back to the Wiimpatja owner families via a Joint Management process in 1998. Kim is also the Research Associate for a national project funded by the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRAH) - 'Good Practice in Funding and Regulation of PHC Services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples'.



Some of the members of Team SA: L-R, Amanda, Janet, Kim, Helen and Syd.

Janet, Helen and Kim first came together because of their similarities and they continue to celebrate the opportunities for learning and action offered by their different life experiences, personal, professional and research journeys.

Moving forward together

The specific focus for the 2007 Action Learning Action Research Process Management conference, *Moving Forward Together and Supporting Aboriginal Ways of Knowing and Doing*,

first evolved when these three women pooled their knowledge, skills, abilities and networks to create a rich and productive learning and action environment. Their ideas and subsequent actions emerged through 'yarnin up' between themselves and other key people such as Ernie Stringer, about the challenges of ethical research and practices between blackfullas and whitefullas. They tapped into their own personal struggles coming to grips with good research practice, and the desire to make positive differences.

Meeting place

From their yarnin up, a question was posed: 'What would a meeting place that promoted and supported action research and action learning, and that incorporated Aboriginal ways of knowing and doing, look and feel like?' This thinking became a reality when Ernie Stringer invited these three women (on behalf of ALARPM), to coordinate the next national Action Learning Action Research Process Management conference in Adelaide 2007. This gave them the opportunity to create a learning place and space that they and others envisioned.

In August 2006, Janet, Helen and Kim started to plan a conference that could 'yarn up' the strengths of action learning, action research and process management in regards to education, health, the environment, business, management, law and lore systems and Aboriginal ways of knowing and doing. The networking and organising team based in Adelaide grew to include people from all three South Australian Universities, the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health and the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre, as well as people from health, education, environment sectors. This dynamic group of people with a wide range of skills, knowledge and experiences became 'Team SA'. One of the first tasks was to

find a suitable venue that could support the intentions of the conference. After much consideration, Tauondi College was chosen. Tauondi College is an independent Australian Aboriginal controlled and managed post-secondary college established in 1973, which provides adult education¹ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders².

Over the next six months a close and reciprocal partnership emerged between Team SA, Tauondi College and ALARPM management and executive. Planning the conference has been underpinned by a deep respect for people, time, place, cultures and process. Very diverse people have been able to come together, bringing their individual and collective skills, knowledge, priorities, and visions to make a very exciting whole. It has been, from the beginning, a very enriching process of moving forwards together, with each group benefiting and learning something new.

In our current political climate here in Australia, one cannot overstate the importance of finding ways to move forwards together that are mutually acceptable and beneficial for all involved. In our fortieth year since the referendum on Indigenous rights of sufferance, there is great need for Australians to work together to challenge segregating and dividing colonisation practices, policies and perspectives that have continued, and even appear to be escalating.

There are so many people in many different areas doing positive, collaborative and creative things 'out there'. This conference creates a space where we can come together, hear from each other, share our knowledge, celebrate what has worked, discuss what has not, and be re-invigorated to go out there and try again.

¹ Visit http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adult_education for a definition of *adult education*.

² Visit http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torres_Strait_Islander for more information about *Torres Strait Islanders*.

We welcome you to join us in our vision. No matter what your interest area is, we invite you to come and join us as we move forwards together.

See you there.

Janet Kelly and Kim O'Donnell
ALARPM National Conference Organisers